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ABSTRACT

The paper draws on findings from three case studies on the changing role of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England and explores the degree of LEA effectiveness, their contribution to school improvement, and the nature of their leadership. The context for the study is one in which, over the years, the powers and responsibilities of LEAs have been reduced and decision making has been dispersed. Results indicate that those LEAs that were most effective sprang from a well-defined professional partnership with schools and clear political partnerships. The partnership with schools was based on professional mutuality and was expressed through a climate of professional challenge and inquiry. Good morale was also seen as important, and it was found that effective education leadership by the LEA can effectively raise morale. The findings suggest that there are substantial differences in the apparent effectiveness of LEAs, but the successful LEAs have a substantial impact on schools in their locality. (RJM)

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Theme: Relational Leadership For Change in an International Context

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'Local Education Authorities in England: Making a difference through their leadership?'

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Synopsis

Theorists and practitioners alike continue to assume that leadership provides a powerful explanation for variations in the performance of schools, and in the success of schools in introducing educational reform. Attention has focused on school leaders: who they are, and how they exercise their leadership. But schools do not exist in a vacuum, and whilst school leadership is important, so too is that of other organisations which have a strong relationship with schools in their local context.

This paper focuses on local education authorities (LEAs) in England and examines their performance and their educational leadership, seeking to characterise what this means and whether, and how, vision is translated into policy, priority and concrete action. It draws on findings from a study of the changing role of local education authorities which has attempted to explore the degrees of their effectiveness; their contribution to quality and school improvement; and the nature of their leadership. The context for the study is one in which, over a period of years, the powers and responsibilities of LEAs have been reduced. Decision-making has become much more dispersed and with some inevitability, the leadership of the LEA has become contested. Findings from the study suggest that there are substantial differences in the apparent effectiveness of LEAs but that successful LEAs can have a substantial impact on schools in their locality - an issue which has relevance for school systems in many countries.

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1 Background

Over recent years, the role of LEAs has changed substantially and their future has been brought into question (Riley 1998). The UK has shared with the US an increased focus on schools as the unit of intervention, with the LEA (as its school district counterpart) seen as the context, rather than as having a clearly defined role (Elmore, 1993). In the UK, local power and decision-making in education has become much more dispersed, and in areas such as provision for post-16 education, the LEA has become only one of many players (Riley,1997a and b).

The election of a Labour Government in 1997 has caused fresh speculation about LEAs. Legislation currently being enacted will give LEAs a defined role to play in the national agenda for school improvement. LEAs have been charged by Government with the task of ensuring that the allotted national targets for each LEA area are achieved. LEAs will also be required to produce Education Development Plans, detailing a planned programme of activity in support of school improvement, and indicating 'robust mechanisms for self-evaluation' (DfEE, 1997).

If they are to achieve those goals, LEAs will need to take a leadership role in their locality. That leadership role is hotly contested, however, most notably by the Chief Inspector of Schools (TES, 1997) who argues that the role of LEAs should be limited to providing support to those 2-3% of schools which have failed their inspection by the Office for Standards in Inspection (Ofsted), and to the further 10% which have been judged to have 'serious weaknesses' (Woodhead, 1998). Support from Government Ministers is far from unequivocal, and to some extent LEAs are on probation, needing to demonstrate that they can win 'the trust and respect of schools' and champion ' the value of education in its community for adults, as well as children' (White Paper 1997, p69).

LEAs will have to match up to these high expectations and satisfy the stringent requirements of external scrutiny. LEAs, as schools, will be subject to national inspection by Ofsted (Staffordshire County Council 1996, Kirklees 1996, Ofsted 1997). Their performance on this, as well as their ability to contribute to national achievement targets will decide their future. In the interim, debate about the role of LEAs continues apace. The national public audit office, for example, has recently published a report which poses questions about the responsibilities and structures of LEAs, as well as the criteria and methods for assessing their effectiveness (Audit Commission, 1998).

How effective have LEAs - or their school district counterparts - been in providing effective local leadership? Researchers looking at American urban schools have argued that the politics of control at school district level have consumed the energy of many American school leaders, distracting them

from their principle task of developing a professional community (Louis and Kruse, 1995). In a similar vein, Canadian researchers concluded that school leaders tended to see the policies and procedures of the local district as hurdles to be overcome (Leithwood, Begley and Cousins, 1994).

However, researchers from both North America and the UK have also concluded that, through targeted resources and support which enable teachers and headteachers to concentrate on specific areas of student learning, LEAs and school districts can make a significant contribution to school improvement (ibid, Coleman and LaRocque 1990, Riley and Rowles, 1997a and b). International evidence from an OECD study supports this analysis. The study of 11 countries found many positive elements in the school/local authority relationship and concluded that schools which exhibited unusually high levels of teacher quality shared a number of characteristics, including 'a symbiotic relationship' between the school, its district authority and community which involved pressure and support at all levels within the context of shared educational values (OECD, 1994) The research evidence to date, therefore, shows a mixed picture: school districts, or LEAs can be a hindrance, and they can also be a help.

II Degrees of Effectiveness

These issues were to the forefront when in late 1995 we began our project, 'The changing role and effectiveness of the LEA'. The context for the study was one in which the 'opting out' provision had existed for several years, and yet the vast majority of schools had remained within the local education authority (1). Typically this fact had been described in negative terms - the schools had not chosen to opt out. However, if one looked at this as a positive decision, i.e. 'the schools had opted for LEA membership', then a number of questions emerged which provided a starting point for the study.

1. What benefits accrued to the schools, and to whom within the schools?
2. Were these benefits stronger for some schools and some LEAs than for others, and if so why?
3. How should the schools and the LEAs act to strengthen the positive aspects of the relationship, and minimise any negative aspects?
4. In particular, how could the capacity of schools for development be supported?

The study, which is ongoing, has focused primarily at the relationship between LEAs and schools but has also looked at other aspects of the LEA's role. To date, seventeen LEAs from different parts of England are involved in the study, and here we report on aspects of our findings from fourteen of them. We have derived our data from three different sources: a questionnaire to elicit views about each

authority's overall performance, styles of working, and the importance and effectiveness of its various services (2); a series of individual interviews with headteachers, senior officers within the LEA and local politicians; and a series of interviews undertaken with different groups who, generally speaking, represented the LEA's 'clients' (e.g. headteachers, school governors, teacher association representatives) but also included other members of the LEA's work force, including front line staff etc (3).

We begin this paper by examining some of the comparative data and then focus on case studies of three LEAs which have been designated as being 'effective' by those who use their services. Our aim is to build a template of how leadership is expressed and the ways in which LEAs can help create a local environment which supports teaching and learning, values teachers' contributions but also challenges their thinking.

III Comparative analysis

In the survey we asked respondents to evaluate the performance of their LEA and found marked variations between authorities. As is shown in Figure 1, the combined ratings of 'competent' or 'excellent' ranged from just 20% in one authority, to as high as 86% in another. The overall ratings reflected marked differences in perceptions about the expectations of specific services, as well as some common concerns about particular services, such as those for children with special education needs and provision for excluded pupils.

We also asked respondents to say how far they agreed/disagreed with 22 statements (some positively and some negatively worded) about the performance of the LEA. From those statements we constructed three scales to evaluate the extent to which the authorities were considered to be 'efficiently managed', 'responsive to needs', or ' improvement-oriented (Figure 2). As with the evaluations of overall performance, responses to items which comprised these performance scales suggested marked differences in perceptions between the authorities. On the whole, authorities attracting favourable or unfavourable judgments in one respect, attracted similar judgments in others.

We also asked respondents how far they thought that the LEA was clear about its future plans (Figure 3). Once again, we found that the differences between them were substantial, and combining the ratings of 'agree' and 'strongly agree', we found a range from 37% to 81%.

What is it that leads an education community to be satisfied with its education authority? On the basis of correlations in six of the authorities (B, C, I, L ,M and N) which have received particularly high

ratings on current performance, we have tried to establish some of the core characteristics across the three performance scales and in relation to specific services. What the authorities have in common is exceptionally high ratings (means of at least 3.00 on a scale of 1 to 4) on the following nine items, the first two of which (*) have elicited the highest ratings (around 3.50 or better):

Improvement-orientated scale:
The LEA is highly supportive of heads and teachers*
The LEA will usually intervene if it thinks a school is in trouble*
The LEA is responsive to complaints

Responsive to needs scale:
The LEA gives all residents in the authority access to education

Efficiently managed scale:
The LEA fights hard to protect funding for education
The LEA consults effectively with schools

Particular services which receive high rating are:
Advice and training for for school governors
Curriculum advisory services
Professional development opportunities for teachers

In general, it would seem that whether an authority is well-regarded depends most of all, on whether it is:

- highly supportive of heads and teachers;
- is prepared to intervene where necessary;
- consults effectively with schools;
- fights hard to protect funding for education and provides value for money;
- provides services which are well targeted to the specific needs of teachers and governors.

The message from schools seems to be 'Show that you value us and value education'.

III The Vision and Educational Leadership Business

But how do LEAs do that ? How do they show that they value education? Does leadership style make a difference? What does educational leadership mean in practice in an LEA? To answer this question, we have looked in some detail at the characteristics of three of the LEAs in our study which have received relatively high ratings, Authority B - 'Lonborough', Authority L -' Blankshire' and Authority M - 'Northcity'. 'Lonborough' scores highly on ratings of current performance (Figure 1) and on the three performance scales (Figure 2). 'Blankshire' scores well on the evaluations of current and future performance (Figure 1) and solidly on the performance scale (Figure 2). 'Northcity' scores

relatively well on the assessment of current performance and is the most highly rated authority in terms of the clarity of its future plans (Figure 3). The three LEAs differ considerably in size, as well as in terms of the communities they serve. Nevertheless, they share some common features about their relationships with schools and in their models of leadership.

Authority B - 'Lonborough'

'Lonborough' is an outer London Borough serving a relatively prosperous community in which the main body of parents are articulate and aware of their rights. However, it also covers some areas of economic and social disadvantage. The political administration of the Council had recently become 'hung' (4) causing some problems but there was strong cross-party support for education and, according to officers, councillors had played an influential role by effective questioning and challenging of bureaucratic procedures that had got in the way in the way. Governors and councillors are proud of the education service, arguing that it proved that state education could work.

When the fieldwork was undertaken, the Director had been in post for several years and the LEA was seen as a stable, closely knit organisation which was respected by schools and had good relationships with them. The leadership was open and responsive with a strong sense of purpose which had an impact on the organisation as a whole. A philosophy of partnership underpinned all the activities:

> 'What is referred to as the education partnership is coming to mean a ....belief in a coherent whole, the strong supporting the weak and the need to work towards a common vision jointly ....It also means a belief very firmly in a public education service rather than market forces.' (officer)

That partnership was tangible and a top priority from both officers and councillors. Headteachers valued the partnership as one of the most important things that an LEA could create. It was a relationship of mutuality, as one headteacher described it, 'Lonborough is one of the best authorities around, people usually support each other and work with each other.'

The partnership was sustained by good communications with staff and trade unions (through bulletins and a system of regular meetings) with schools and governors (through a range of forums, formal and informal meetings and newsletters) and for all concerned by events such as the annual borough conference. Governors and headteachers felt that they could talk directly to councillors about their concerns. Although the partnership had been created at 'quite a cost' to the staff involved (in terms of time, energy and commitment), nevertheless, plans were being made to make the partnership even more effective by extending it to as many parents as possible.

Administrative services such as finance, payroll and personnel, clerking of governors meetings were

well run, according to the views of users of those services. For headteachers, the advisory service was perceived as being at the heart of teaching and learning and something which schools valued as an important element of the partnership.

The leadership within the service came from the Director . She was described variously as, 'one of the best in the country.... a dedicated professional' (a councillor), 'an educationalists who had come up the hard way' (a governor), 'demanding but always willing to listen' (officer). Headteachers, in particular, appreciated both her leadership style and her commitment to education:

'She has a very particular style .. and treats everybody's remarks as important.'
'The Director holds schools so tightly in her regard that they are never forgotten.'

In the view of councillors, effective leadership was dependent not just on the quality of the Director but also on the nature of the relationship between the Director and Chair of the Education Committee, (both of whom were seen as being very good in 'Lonborough'). This perception of the importance of the interaction between the political and the professional leadership was seen by the Director in the following terms:

'The politicians help shape the climate but the impetus in terms of education comes from the officers, particularly the senior officer team.'

The Director did not see herself as an individual player, nevertheless, she had been instrumental in taking on critical issues.....

'When I first started, the department was in culture shock. No one worked together. There was no unifying theme, so I had to do the development plan. The initial ideas came from me but we consulted extensively for about a year and the plan is now very widely owned.....'

and in providing the creative challenge.....

'....As an authority, overall, we do well on the national league tables but there is a level of complacency and part of what I try to do is to provide the challenge.'

There was a strong focus on achievement in 'Lonborough' and relatively high levels of performance. But there were also a concern that the needs of the less able, those with behavioural difficulties, or those who were disenchanted with schooling were not being met. As one councillor described it.

'The top are doing better every year .....the gap is widening and..... the less good people are not coming at the same rate.. We (also) share with the rest of the country a (worry) about differences between the achievement of boys and girls.. We've had such an emphasis, quite correctly perhaps on special educational needs..... but there is a very big problem... I'm sure it

is a national one of tackling behavioural problems.'

Flowing from this, there was a growing recognition by all the key players that schools needed greater challenges and the inspectorate advisory services was being reshaped to provide a sharper focus on achievement. Heads welcomed this but at the same time were also reluctant to lose the strong personal contact which characterised relationships in the Borough. Although 'Lonborough' faced a number of challenges, it was a highly rated authority which benefited from:

- the high levels of personal and professional commitment of staff;
- clear and well-defined educational leadership;
- common understanding of, and commitment to, partnership;
- effective and well targeted core services;
- high expectations about achievement, and high levels of performance.

Authority L - 'Blankshire'

'Blankshire' is a large, well-established county education authority (5). It serves a diverse population which is located in rural areas, as well as large towns, and has pockets of high unemployment and social disadvantage. The authority has functioned against a backdrop of political stability over many years and strong political support for education, although it has been faced with continual budget reductions.

Throughout the period of rapid change experienced by all LEAs, 'Blankshire' has been able to attract, and retain staff of a high calibre. The organisation has valued the strengths and talents of individuals but until recent times, according to our respondents, it has been an individualised, somewhat hierarchical and male culture which has suffered from a degree of complacency. As one officer described it,

> 'The old culture was ....a kind of militaristic leadership where you defended your own corner, fought off other people, and instructed others to do things.'

A new Chief Education Officer (CEO) had been appointed some 18 months before the fieldwork took place, and he was seen by all concerned as having a modernising impact on the culture, and as providing firm and vigorous leadership. As one officer described it,

> 'What we clearly have at the moment is somebody who has vision and is a leader, somebody who is taking us in a new direction. What is very interesting to me is that a number of people who perhaps are coming to the end of their careers certainly suddenly feel invigorated and that

is remarkable'.

But the educational leadership of 'Blankshire' was not seen as emanating from one individual, although the CEO was critical in creating the leadership climate. In the words of another officer,

> 'The CEO is an important figurehead but what matters is a notion of leadership which enables others to be leaders.'

The CEO saw his own leadership style in the following terms:

> 'I see my job, I suppose, in Drucker's terms as enabling others to succeed.....I'm not looking for people to be subservient, I am looking for people to take a lead in their own context and to feel that they have a vibrant role to play, so that they can take initiative. I suppose the modern jargon is 'empowering' ".

The senior management team in the department played an important role in the leadership of the organisation and were valued for their broad perspective and expertise. As a group, they were seen increasingly as the 'leadership team', not just as the management team - a particularly important development in an organisation the size of 'Blankshire'. The CEO described developments in the following terms:

> 'We have reached the point where the SMT have pledged their allegiance first to the SMT, rather than to their own individual areas. If you look at the Howard Gardener stuff, we have got all the bits now, and we're trying to make it all work to best effect in the organisation.'

'Blankshire' does not have a banner waving culture but a vision and clear priorities about what can be achieved locally were emerging. By common consent the vision had been shaped by officers and members working together through a well-defined political partnership. Leading members had been instrumental in setting and sustaining the new agenda. 'There is a genuine role for the chair and vice-chair of education that is beginning to be felt', one senior officer commented.

The vision was one which recognised that whilst education had an important role to play in the local economy, it also contributed to human growth and fulfilment. There was a shared view that there were groups within the community who were disenfranchised by their lack of education opportunities - young people without the skills and confidence to move forward, women who had left work for family commitments and returned to low paid, unskilled jobs. The boundaries of expectations were clear - no more 'failing' schools, higher aspirations for young people. As one senior local politician commented:

> 'There may be differences in opportunities, there may be differences in the ways that people grasp those opportunities, but in the intelligence stakes, I don't believe that there are many differences.'

The authority had developed a strategic plan which provided the core articulation of the authority's objectives, and at the time of the research was consulting widely on this. Although it was early days, headteachers felt very involved in the process and as one headteacher commented, 'We now have a common sense of direction.. there is a definite sense of leadership and priorities.'

The leadership style of the organisation was experienced as 'enabling', 'consultative' and 'more inclusive and involving than in the past'. Services for governors were well supported. Headteachers valued the good working-relationships with the authority and the emerging vision:

'The LEA should have aspirations for its schools..'
'The Authority can influence tremendously by negotiating the right sort of targets.'

The LEA's efforts to create a partnership ethos with schools and parents and to provide information targeted at school improvement, such as 'value-added' data were seen as being invaluable. Headteachers saw their job as enabling teachers to use that information effectively. Nevertheless, there were elements of LEA services (such as special education needs and the performance of the inspectorate advisory services) which needed to be strengthened. The authority had not in the past been particularly effective in identifying serious weaknesses in schools, prior to Ofsted inspection. However, SEN services were under review and the advisory service had recently undergone a major restructuring and refocusing exercise. The changes were apparent and there was an optimism in the air which stemmed from 'Blankshire's' strengths which included :

- A strong relationship between the CEO and the political structure which ensured that the ground rules were clear and that staff knew that they had political support;
- Strong relationships with schools, the local church diocese and professional associations;
- A cohort of headteachers committed to improvement and open to challenge;
- Specific projects (such as the 'value-added' project on school improvement) which enabled schools to gain a clear understanding of pupil progress;
- A clearer focus on student outcomes, and on measuring those outcomes;
- Professional commitment and expertise, including a revitalised inspectorate and advisory service.

Authority M - 'Northcity'

'Northcity' is a medium-size metropolitan authority serving an area of high unemployment and disadvantage in the North of England. Until recent years, the LEA could have been characterised as a somewhat remote and top-down authority whose activities were linked together by bureaucratic

arrangements and strong political allegiances. It had experienced a period of uncertainty, including a high turnover rate of Directors of Education (four in five years - one of whom had departed following a vote of 'no confidence' from headteachers). Ofsted had designated several schools as 'failing' and this had contributed to a sense of demoralisation amongst headteachers.

Data from the study indicated that the education department was experiencing a period of rapid transformation. The local authority overall was becoming less hierarchical and more corporate. Anti-poverty strategies and urban regeneration were becoming key elements in the renewal of the city as a whole. A new Director of Education had been appointed nearly two years earlier, and the change in the administrative leadership of the LEA had had a marked impact on the culture within the LEA which was now characterised by openness and clarity of purpose. Relationships were based on solid working partnerships but the LEA nevertheless, retained the fragility of an organisation in transition.

A broad partnership within the LEA had been forged over a 2-3 year period, following a 'fresh start' initiative which had focused on achievement, special needs and the effective use of resources. These priorities had been set by a conference of headteachers, chairs of governors, officers and councillors which had since become an annual event, and a central feature of the authority's partnership strategy, reflected in the shared clarity about the LEAs future plans (Figure 3) and the comment of the different partners:

> 'The fresh start initiative enabled us to refocus on our main priorities.... and to narrow some of the divisions between schools which had merged because of LMS and market forces.' (councillor)

> "The annual conference has become our way of setting the agenda in 'Northcity'. We have agreed our priorities together and there is ownership about them." (headteacher)

The leadership of the LEA was closely identified with that of the Director. His integrity, energy and style of educational leadership which was strongly focused on education debate was welcomed and respected. In the words of one headteacher,'thanks to the new Director, we're now all pulling in the same direction', and of a councillor, 'we've now got very good leadership in the LEA'.

The Director had adopted a high-profile style, in response to the instabilities of the past. However, it was a style which also provided opportunities for others to lead. As the Director himself commented, 'I don't believe in heroic leadership but because of the history of the organisation, the department seems to revolve round my personality'. He saw his own preferred leadership style in the following terms:

> 'In the end what you have to do is give everyone the capacity to take on their areas of responsibility, have an expectation that everyone can do that. .. I would characterise the

leadership of the organisation (and that's not just me) in terms of educational leadership.. ... It's about using but not controlling the education debate..... creating a climate of thinking and challenge about education.'

This thinking had filtered through much of the organisation and was reflected in the management team which was seen as a professional group with a wide-range of skills who worked well together and had, according to a headteacher adopted, ' a confident and approachable style'.

Officers, politicians and headteachers all valued the new style of management which had been adopted within the LEA and appreciated the new structural arrangements. As in 'Blankshire' and 'Lonborough' there was a strong perception that whilst the Director gave a clear educational and administrative lead, this was in the context of a well-defined political partnership in which leading members have made a significant contribution, and core aims had been clearly articulated.

'The department is responsible for delivering the political will but the political will is informed by a two-way process between members and officers and informed by the professional expertise of senior officers.' (councillor)

Nevertheless, in the view of some headteachers, vestiges of the political partisanship of the past still remained.

Despite the improvement of recent years, the authority still faced a number of major problems, not least in relation to pupil outcomes. As one senior officer commented, 'There are still formidable problems of underachievement and it is a painful process moving things forward, despite the commitment and high expectations of headteachers'. 'Northcity' also suffered from a plethora of initiatives and pilot projects. There was a sense that projects always seemed to be at the initiation and implementation stages and rarely got to the evaluation, or reflection stages, a state of affairs which led one headteacher to comment, 'we're great starters and lousy finishers' and another 'we've more pilots here than Heathrow'. It also had issues about special educational needs and pupil exclusion which needed to be resolved but nevertheless, what it had going for it was:

- A growing capacity for self renewal (both physical renewal of the city itself and renewal through education);
- Clarity about objectives and how they were to be achieved;
- A momentum, enthusiasm and commitment to raise achievement which included schools and the LEA;
- Rising expectations which were beginning to counter the perception of the LEA as one

which served 'a deprived city, content to drift along';

• Clear educational leadership from the Director, endorsed by politicians, and sustained by other officers.

IV Concluding thoughts

On the basis of the three case studies presented here, and analysis of the other eleven LEAs, those LEAs which were highly rated had excellent administrative practices (including efficient monitoring and evaluation schemes for school); a 'working with you' approach (which provided schools with clear data and analysis of performance and support for tackling such issues as pupil behaviour, or attendance); and expertise in key areas such as curriculum, personnel and finance.

The strengths of those LEAs defined as being the most effective, sprang from a well-defined professional partnership with schools, and a clear political partnership with councillors. The partnership with schools was based on professional mutuality and was expressed through a climate of professional challenge and inquiry. The professional/political interaction contributed to the effectiveness of the LEA and through their deep understanding of local issues, the councillors were able to provide a healthy challenge to the professionals, in the same way that LEA officers can provided a similar challenge to schools.

Good morale in schools is critical to improvement and effective educational leadership by the LEA can contribute to raising morale. All three of the case study authorities reported here had helped create a climate in which schools moved forward together. Such a climate is characterised by school improvement projects which stimulate professional debate and contribute to the development planning processes in schools and equip them to evaluate their own progress. Governors receive supportive information, such as briefing papers. Headteachers receive professional advice and support which includes interpretation of changing national expectations and information about about curriculum innovation, or developments in pedagogy. All of this practical support is linked to a clear vision of education in the locality, and sustained by a clear model of educational leadership.

Although all three case study LEAs had directors who were education leaders (ie who were respected as professionals and had clear views about what could be achieved and how, and a determination to influence the educational discourse) there was little evidence of 'heroic' leadership, and much evidence of shared leadership. In 'Northcity', however, past events had pushed the Director into becoming a more individual and 'up front' leader than he would have wished to be. The evidence from our study is that effective LEA leadership, as effective leadership of schools, is influenced by context, as well as the

attributes and experiences which the leading figures bring to it.

Drawing on the three case studies, we have constructed the beginnings of a template which attempts to capture some of the features of successful educational leadership on the part of the LEA (Figure 4). By its focus, style and activities, LEAs can and do to make a difference. These differences are expressed in the values which an LEA articulates; how it defines its strategic direction; how it interprets its leadership role; and how it functions - its mode of operation. When LEAs are improvement orientated and maximise their educational leadership potential, schools reap the benefits.

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Notes

1. The 'opt out' provision allowed schools to vote to become independent of the LEA and to be nationally funded. Under the 1997 Labour Government, this provision has been rescinded

2. The project has been conducted in three overlapping phases, the first two of which have now been completed. In phase I, pilot work in two London borough enabled us to refine our questionnaire (distributed to 2,210 respondents), test the internal consistency of the performance scales, and make changes to the interview schedule. In phase II, the revised questionnaire was circulated to 4,173 respondents in a further nine London boroughs). Phase III involves five shire authorities and one metropolitan authority. These latter surveys are more intensive than in Phase II, and include extensive interviewing. The questionnaire has been further adapted in the light of Phase II experience, with the items varying somewhat from one authority to another to accommodate the particular services offered, though a core has been retained for comparative purposes.

3. During these group interviews, we have used a card sort ranking exercise based on twenty statements about the LEA which had been drawn from previous interview data.

4. 'Lonborough' and 'Northcity' are unitary authorities, i.e. the local authority has control of all local services. 'Blankshire' is a shire authority which has control of major services such as education and social services. However, other local services such a housing are run by local district authorities.

5. A 'Hung' administration is one in which there is no political majority.

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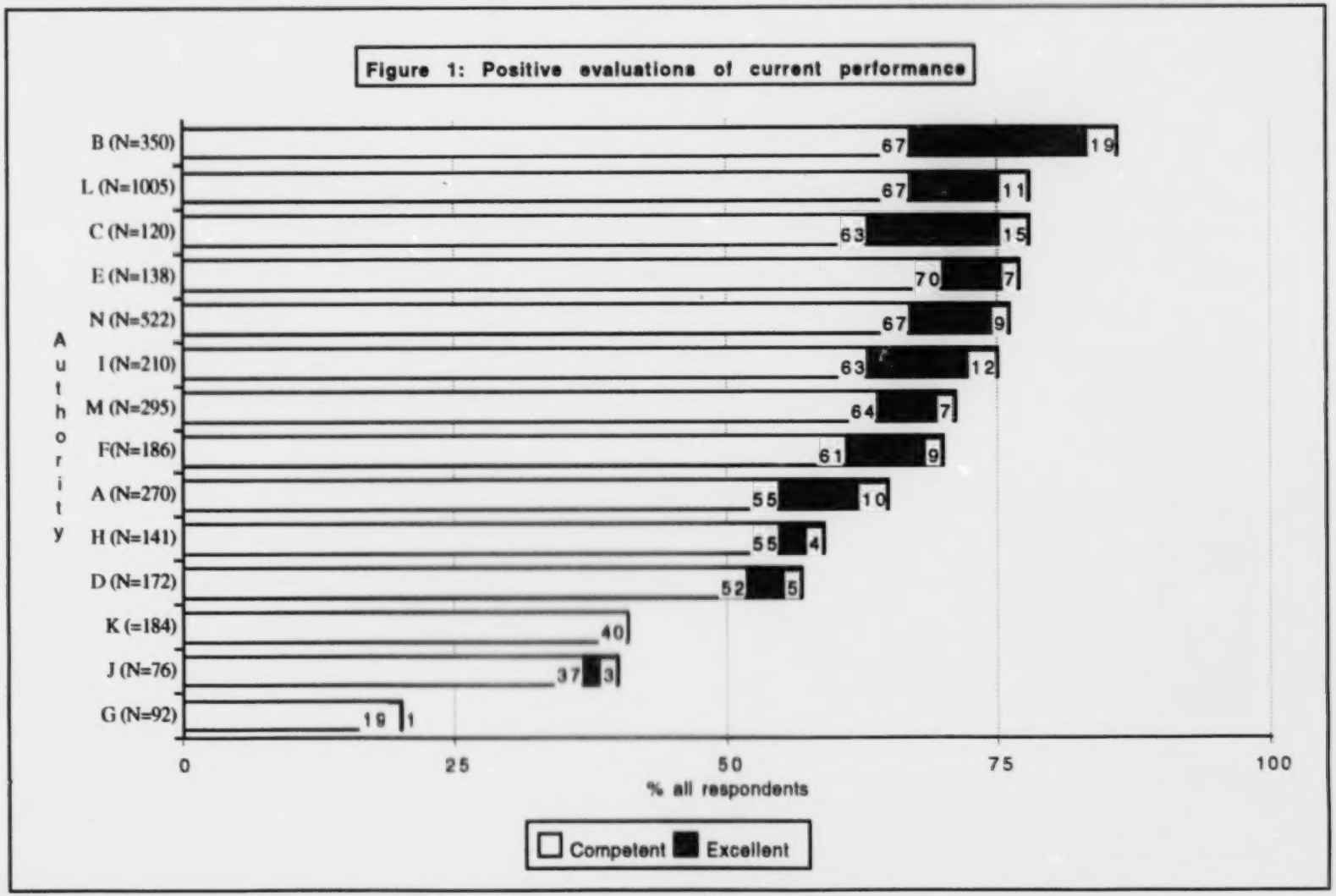
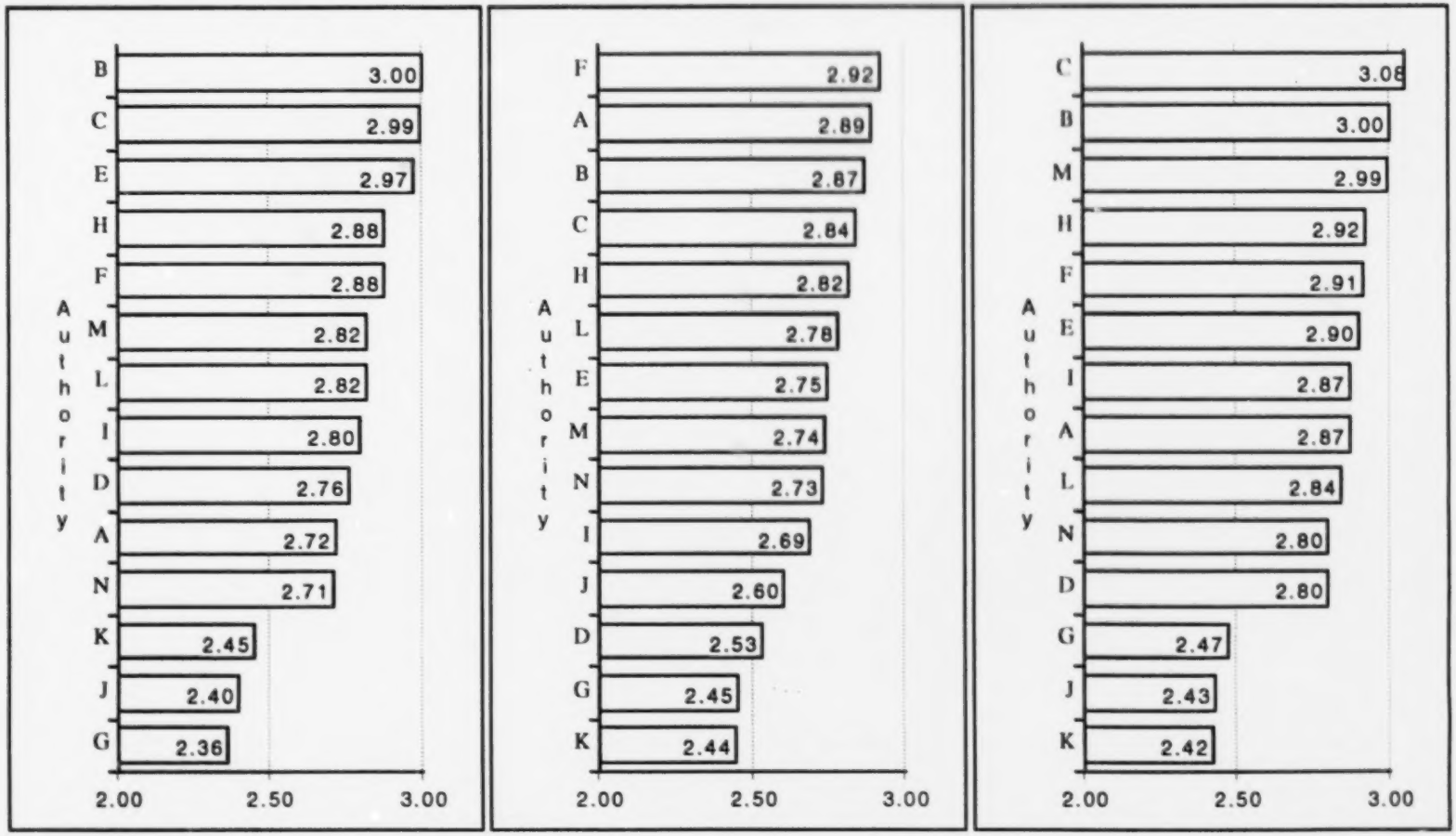


Figure 1: Positive evaluations of current performance
B (N=350)
L (N=1005)
C (N=120)
E (N=138)
N (N=522)
I (N=210)
M (N=295)
F(N=186)
A (N=270)
H (N=141)
D (N=172)
K (=184)
J (N=76)
G (N=92)
67
19
67
11
63
15
70
7
67
9
63
12
64
7
61
9
55
10
55
4
52
5
40
37
3
19
1
Authority
0
25
50
75
100
% all respondents
Competent
Excellent

13

Figure 2: Mean ratings (on scale from 1 [strongly disagree] to 4 [strongly agree]) for aspects of perfor



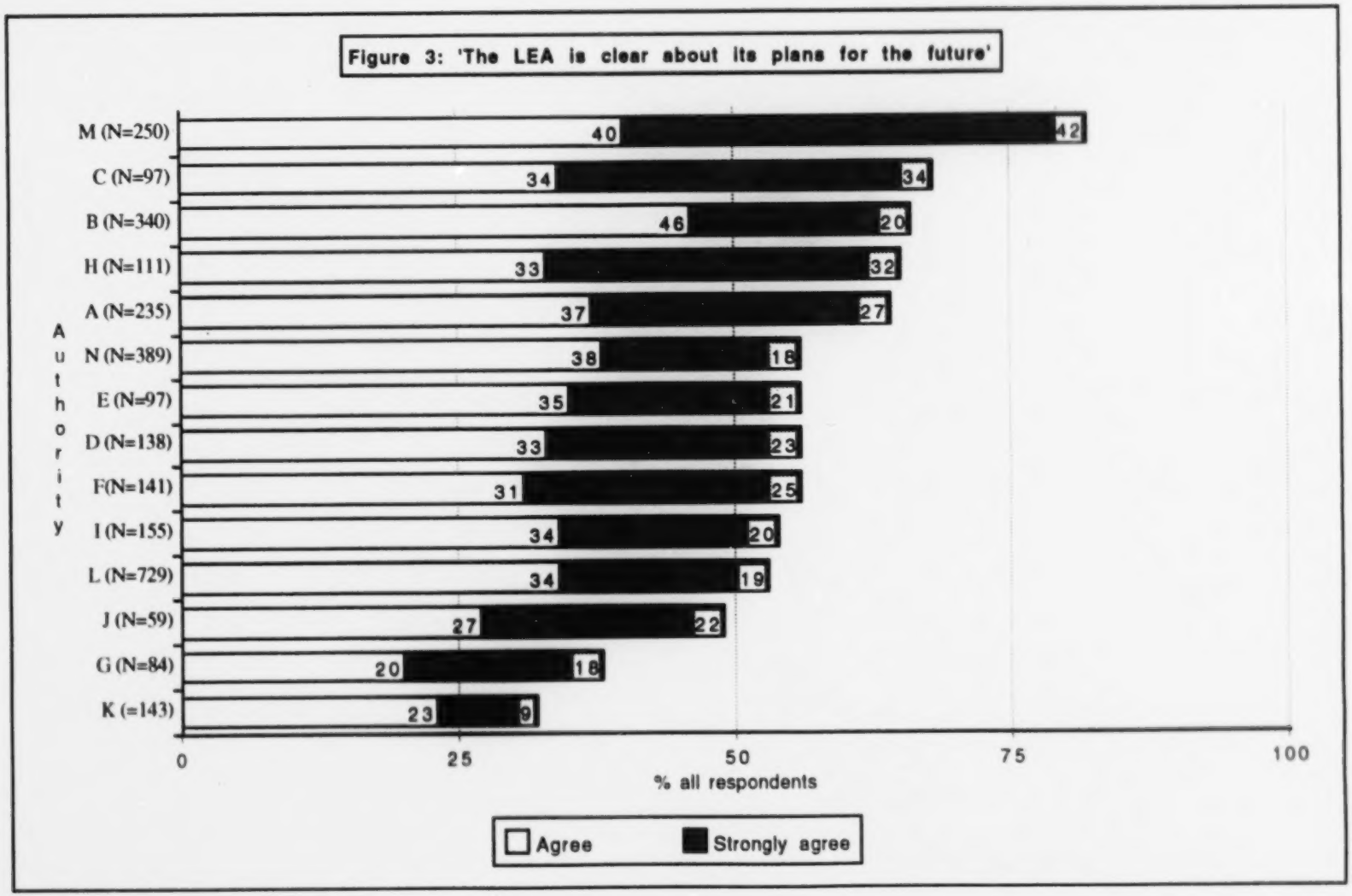
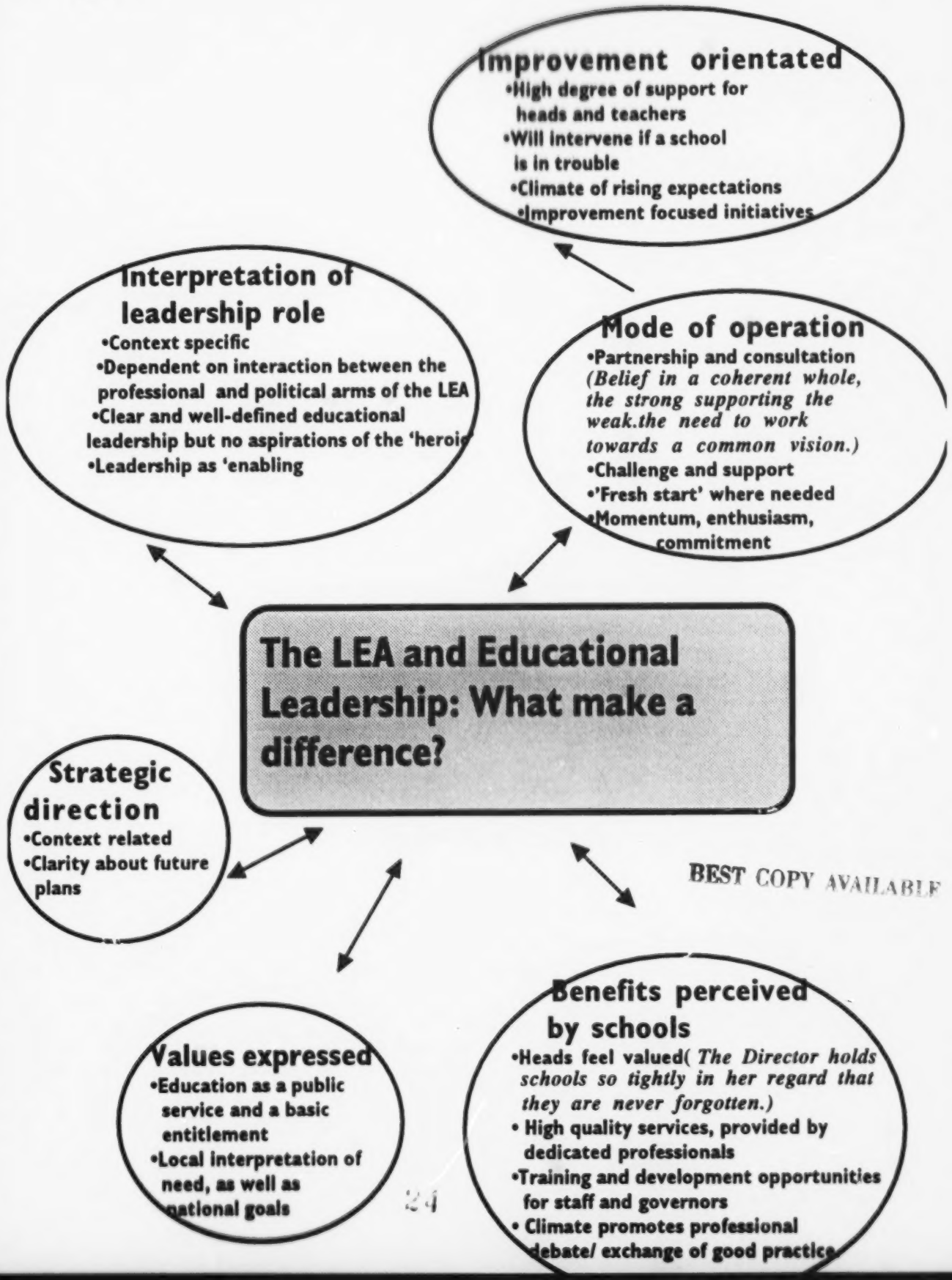


Figure 3: 'The LEA is clear about its plans for the future'
M (N=250)
C (N=97)
B (N=340)
H (N=111)
A (N=235)
N (N=389)
E (N=97)
D (N=138)
F(N=141)
I (N=155)
L (N=729)
J (N=59)
G (N=84)
K (=143)
Authority
40
42
34
34
46
20
33
32
37
27
38
18
35
21
33
23
31
25
34
20
34
19
27
22
20
18
23
9
0
25
50
75
100
% all respondents
Agree
Strongly agree

Figure 4


Improvement orientated
•High degree of support for heads and teachers
•Will intervene if a school is in trouble
•Climate of rising expectations
•Improvement focused initiatives
Interpretation of leadership role
•Context specific
•Dependent on interaction between the professional and political arms of the LEA
•Clear and well-defined educational leadership but no aspirations of the 'heroic'
•Leadership as 'enabling
Mode of operation
•Partnership and consultation (Belief in a coherent whole, the strong supporting the weak.the need to work towards a common vision.)
•Challenge and support
•'Fresh start' where needed
•Momentum, enthusiasm, commitment
The LEA and Educational Leadership: What make a difference?
Strategic direction
•Context related
•Clarity about future plans
Values expressed
•Education as a public service and a basic entitlement
•Local interpretation of need, as well as national goals
Benefits perceived by schools
•Heads feel valued(The Director holds schools so tightly in her regard that they are never forgotten.)
• High quality services, provided by dedicated professionals
•Training and development opportunities for staff and governors
• Climate promotes professional debate/ exchange of good practice

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